

# Lab 257: The Disturbing Story of the Government's Secret Germ Laboratory

[Richard A. Widmann](#)

*Lab 257: The Disturbing Story of the Government's Secret Germ Laboratory*, by Michael Christopher Carroll, Harper, New York, 2004, 301 pp.

Lab 257 examines the history of the US Government's Animal Disease Center on Plum Island, New York. Plum Island is a small island (3 miles long and 1 mile wide) situated off the eastern end of the North Fork coast of Long Island. It is about 85 miles from New York City and less than 10 miles from Old Lyme, Connecticut.

Author Michael Christopher Carroll details a web of government cover-ups, secret germ warfare, environmental contamination, virus outbreaks, Nazi scientists, Al Qaeda terrorists, the Department of Homeland Security, Lyme Disease, and the West Nile Virus.

While *Lab 257* appears to be a well-researched book that undoubtedly reveals various inconvenient truths about the facilities on Plum Island, it is at times sensationalistic and its most important arguments are often circumstantial. Carroll also avoids addressing or debunking even-more-outlandish theories about what was actually happening on Plum Island and the laboratories operating there.

A quick Google search on "Plum Island" produces extraordinary claims like the AIDS virus was man-made by Nazi scientists working in Plum Island's labs. There is even a website dedicated entirely to the "Montauk Monster" a creature that is described as looking like a "dead dog" or a "dead sea-otter" that some say originated from experiments on Plum Island. On an episode of his TV show "Conspiracy Theory," pro-wrestler- turned-Minnesota-governor Jesse Ventura reported on happenings at the facility. Ventura too tells a tale of Nazi scientists, the invention and ultimate outbreak of Lyme disease, and, yes, even the Montauk Monster.



*The Plum Island Animal Disease Center.*

*Source: Photo by Keith Weller (K6086-7). Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.*

Carroll's narrative is much more "sober" than Ventura's but still he walks a fine line between history, investigative reporting, and tabloid sensationalism. While Carroll eschews the AIDS conspiracy, he provides similar evidence for the invention or weaponization of Lyme Disease (with the involvement of a Nazi scientist.) What makes one tale more credible than the other?

At its best, *Lab 257* tells the history of the Plum Island Animal Disease Center (PIADC), which was established by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in 1954 on the site of the former US military installation Fort Terry.

Carroll begins his book, however, with a discussion of virus outbreaks arguably associated with Plum Island before relaying the history of its sixty years of operation (up to the publication of the book). In fact the first chapter of the book attempts to build a connection to the first significant outbreak of Lyme Disease in the US in 1975; the second chapter draws connections to the 1999 outbreak of West Nile Virus and the third recounts the events surrounding the 1967 outbreak of Dutch Duck Plague (duck virus enteritis).

The possibility that any of these diseases originated from the work on Plum Island and their outbreaks resulted from unsafe work conditions provides the intrigue—the reason to read, and perhaps write, the book. This conspiratorial plotline, complete with suggestions of cover-ups, draws in readers who might otherwise have little interest in the history of a USDA facility. But Carroll's research fails to persuade. In fact, for all his hard work the evidence remains circumstantial at best. He summarizes his argument in this way:

*Three infectious germs, Bb [Borrelia burgdorferi is the predominant causative agent of Lyme Disease – Ed.], West Nile virus, and duck enteritis virus—all foreign germs—have infiltrated the American landscape. All three emerged from the same geographic locus. All three occurred in the vicinity of a high-hazard, high-containment foreign germ laboratory with demonstrably faulty facilities and pitiable biological safety practices—flaws that caused proven germ outbreaks in the past, and infections among its employees. The public is asked to accept that none of these three outbreaks is connected to Plum Island.*

Lyme Disease gets the first position among these three outbreaks, not because of its chronology related to West Nile or Dutch Duck Plague but likely because of the growing number of people afflicted with the disease, the challenges and controversies surrounding "Chronic Lyme Disease" and the outspokenness of various Lyme Disease advocates and activists.

Carroll recounts briefly the outbreak in 1975 that afflicted 39 children and 12 adults, which was initially misdiagnosed as "juvenile rheumatoid arthritis." Within two years, it was understood that this ailment, by then dubbed "Lyme Arthritis" was the result of a bite from a deer tick. By 1981 based on the research of Dr. Wally Burgdorfer it was understood that a new spirochete immersed in the fluid of the deer tick was to blame. From this point forward, "Lyme Arthritis" would be known as "Lyme Disease." While this period does mark the first modern outbreak in the US and the naming of the disease, researchers have since identified the existence of Lyme Disease dating back over 5,000 years. So what does this all have to do with Lab 257 on Plum Island? Here Carroll brings us back to the closing days of World War Two.

Carroll retells the story of Project [Operation] Paperclip, in which the US Office of Strategic Services (OSS) arranged to recruit over 1,500 German scientists, technicians and engineers from defeated Nazi

Germany and bring them to the US. Best known among these were Wernher von Braun and Arthur Rudolph, both of whom were instrumental in the US space program.

Among the lesser-known scientists involved in this program was Dr. Erich Traub. Traub was apparently lab chief at Insel Riems, a National Socialist biological-warfare laboratory on an island in the Baltic Sea. Carroll asserts that Traub worked directly for *SS Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler. While this sounds impressive or important to the uninformed, Traub did not work directly for Himmler. Rather the Institute was administered by the *Innenministerium* (Ministry of the Interior), which Himmler took over in 1943. The chain of command was Himmler, Dr. Leonardo Conti (Reich Health Leader), Kurt Blome, Otto Waldmann, and then Traub.

According to Carroll, Traub packaged weaponized foot-and-mouth disease virus “which was dispersed from a Luftwaffe bomber onto cattle and reindeer in occupied Russia.” Attempting to inflate Traub’s importance, Carroll asserts that he was also a member of the *NSKK (Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrkorps)* (National Socialist Motor Corps), which he describes as “a powerful Nazi organization that ranked directly behind the SA (Storm Troopers) and the SS (Elite Corps).” While such a description of NS hierarchy is unrecognizable to anyone familiar with the subject, the reality of the *NSKK* is likely not common knowledge. The *NSKK* was condemned during the Nuremberg Trials (little surprise) but not found to be a criminal organization. Even Wikipedia readily admits,

*The primary aim of the NSKK was to educate its members in motoring skills. They were mainly trained in the operation and maintenance of high performance motorcycles and automobiles. In the mid-1930s, the NSKK also served as a roadside assistance group, comparable to the modern-day American Automobile Association or the British Automobile Association.*

Carroll stretches the connection to Plum Island by commenting that Traub was also a member of the *Amerikadeutscher Volksbund* (German American Bund), which he erroneously claims was “also known as Camp Siegfried [sic].” Carroll goes on to call Camp Siegfried “the national headquarters of the American Nazi movement” and highlights that Camp Siegfried was just thirty miles west of Plum Island in Yaphank, Long Island. The Bund, which was primarily formed to promote a favorable view of NS Germany, had many camps throughout the US of which Camp Siegfried was one. Its proximity to Plum Island is irrelevant to the narrative.

While Traub did visit Plum Island, and was even there during the opening ceremony in 1956, his activities were very limited. Carroll builds the entire foundation for his theory around Traub, but admits that there is only evidence that Traub visited Plum Island on three occasions. While the USDA did offer Traub the “top scientist” job at Plum Island twice, Traub turned them down, preferring to work at the West German virus facility in Tübingen.

While there is evidence that tick experiments were conducted on Plum Island, the sinister connection to Dr. Traub is implausible and proof that the Lyme Disease outbreak of the 1970s originated on Plum Island is purely circumstantial. For his most interesting assertions, Carroll depends on anonymous and secondary source material including the book *The Belarus Secret* by John Loftus, whose thesis was described as “overzealous” by the *New York Times*. Carroll might have done well to give more credence to former Plum Island director Dr. Jerry Callis, who asserted, “Not now or ever had we anything to do with Lyme Disease.”

Carroll's exaggerations and loose talk about Dr. Traub play well to a receptive but otherwise ill-informed public schooled on Holocaust lore. Such a public is quick to believe anything sinister and evil about NS Germany; a regime that could commit genocide could certainly have invented Lyme Disease. A careful reader, however, must become suspicious of the balance of the story that he tells.

This is unfortunate for Carroll's thesis. For once he begins to tell the history of labs on Plum Island from 1956 on, he has a sober and chilling tale to tell. His exposé about the flushing of contaminated sewage into area waters, infected workers, violation of OSHA standards and the general failure to properly maintain a facility that houses dangerous viruses in a geographic area prone to storms and hurricanes is worth noting. In our post 9/11 world, the suggestion that Al-Qaeda may have targeted the facility, which was transferred to the Department of Homeland Security, is also worth noting.

United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced a final "Record of Decision (ROD): Public Sale of Plum Island, New York". This may be best for all involved.

Moving the facility and a full-scale clean-up of the island would allow it, over time, to return to being a natural habitat for various forms of wildlife and eliminate any threat to neighboring New York and Connecticut. Such a move would also allow fantastic stories of the US Government working nefariously with Nazi scientists to create Lyme Disease, the AIDS virus, and even horrific sea monsters to be relegated to the dustbin of Twentieth Century conspiracy theories.

<b>Author(s):</b>	<a href="#">Richard A. Widmann</a>
<b>Title:</b>	Lab 257: The Disturbing Story of the Government's Secret Germ Laboratory
<b>Sources:</b>	<i>Inconvenient History</i> , 6(4) 2014
<b>Dates:</b>	published: 2014-11-30, first posted: 2014-12-07 00:00:00

<https://www.inconvenienthistory.com/6/4/3337>